
EXPEDITION MESSENGER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ARNOLD EXPEDITION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

May 2021



Calendar

May 22 – Trail clearing. Meet at Pond Road turnout by 8:30 AM.
Rain date May 29.

June 19 – Directors' meeting at Colburn barn, 9:30 AM.

August 28 – [Fort Halifax Day](#), Winslow. Parade 9 AM, events 11-4.

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Nichols Cabin in Use

From July 26 to August 13, the Nichols cabin on Middle Carry Pond will be in use by volunteers from the [Maine Appalachian Trail Club](#) doing cleanup between there and the West Carry.



Newsletters Posted Online, Mostly

Thanks to Mike Holt, the [AEHS web page](#) has been greatly updated and improved. Links to past issues of this newsletter are included, but there are some gaps. If you have copies of issues #81 through #99 (1996 – 2001) please contact Mike at 20 Osborne St., Fairfield ME 04937 or by [email](#).

Road Plaques: Winslow/Fort Halifax

Clayton McLaughlin has been traveling the Arnold route documenting the commemorative plaques along the way. This issue we feature Winslow, Maine. The marker is on the east bank of the Kennebec River about three hundred yards south of Fort Halifax. In 1775 the boats were all drawn up into the embayment on the west side of the river; the troops on foot would have used the old military road that connected Fort Western and Fort Halifax along the east bank. During the flood of 1987 this plaque was under four to five feet of water. Hopefully they will have better weather for [Fort Halifax Day](#) this year (see Calendar).

Montresor revisited

A short [video](#) covers John Montresor, the British Army engineer whose map, while imperfect, was all Arnold had to go on in 1775. (It is on YouTube as “Mapping Revolutionary New York” but the subtext admits to covering “parts of neighboring colonies”. Address any complaints to the Society of the Cincinnati.)

A copy of Montresor’s map of 1760 appears on page 7 below.



New Book About the March

Our own Steve Clark and [Steven Darley](#) are working on a new book on the March to Quebec, to be featured in the [Journal of the American Revolution](#). Steve C. has shared some chapters he has written. Here is the first chapter, so far numbered “X”.

Across the Great Carrying Place – A New Look

by Steve Clark

The Expedition at this point was on the Upper Kennebec’s main stem, strung out for more than twenty miles and was struggling through shallow, fast water conditions, typical for that time of year. The men were out of their bateaux, dragging the heavily-laden craft over the river’s gravel and rock-strewn beds. The lead division was Capt. Daniel Morgan’s crack rifle company and two Pennsylvania rifle companies.

Above the fourth and final portage, Devil’s Falls, the men observed that the route was entering the mountains and the river was becoming continuously fast water. This frequent dragging on the river’s bottom caused more leaks on the slowly disintegrating bateaux.

On Oct. 7th the lead elements reached a small brook on the west shore of the river. This marked the beginning of the Great Carrying Place portage trail.

Before proceeding with the narrative of the army’s progress and understanding of the route’s intricacies and topography is important. Above this point the Kennebec becomes continuously rapid water. Ten miles beyond the portage the river reached the Forks where it divides into its east and west branches. The East Branch bears northeast to its source, Moosehead Lake.

The west branch assumes a new name, the “Dead River,” which was and is far from dead. This branch swings west, then south gaining a phenomenal 700 feet making it virtually impassable for any craft, with long stretches of heavy rapids and several huge falls.

Above this unnavigable stretch, the river reaches an upland plateau, then the Dead River placidly assumes its name winding 25 miles across this valley.

Native Americans had discovered a shorter and safer portage to avoid this bad stretch centuries before, in order to prevent damage to their fragile bark canoes. It became a part of the main route of travel from the Atlantic to reach the St. Lawrence Valley.

The portage was called the Great Carrying Place and was a difficult thirteen miles in length. It utilized three small ponds to lessen the portaging effort. It had

been known to Native Americans and by various Jesuit missionaries. It had also been explored and documented by a British engineer, Montresor, in 1761. His descriptions were utilized by both Gen. Washington and Arnold to plan the campaign to capture all of Canada. However, the thirteen-mile carry presented many formidable difficulties to the army's passage.

First, the route was poorly marked, which was why Lieutenants Church and Steele had been ordered ahead to mark and reconnoiter it.

Second, the portage trail was only the width of a single lightweight bark canoe. A 400-pound wooden bateau carried by men on either side would require a pathway six to eight feet wide. Therefore much labor would have to be expended in the widening. This would also slow the advance and expend much of the men's energy. The crews had only rudimentary axes to accomplish this. For an army depending on speed and surprise to capture Quebec, this did not bode well.

Third, and by far the most critical was the issue of elevation that had to be overcome along the route. The gain from Fort Western at tidewater up the Kennebec to the Great Carrying Place had been a difficult 450-foot upriver climb, but had been spread out over seventy miles. From

the Kennebec to the first pond (East Carry), was a distance of 3.25 miles, but the climb was a phenomenal 800 feet, about two-thirds the height of the Empire State Building. More on this later.

It is important to comprehend the effort required for such a major portage. There were four separate legs on the entire 13-mile portage. The first and worst was from the Kennebec to the first pond (East Carry), a distance of 3.25 mi. The second was shorter 0.6 mi., from East to Middle Carry. The third was from Middle to West Carry, a more or less level 2.5 mi. The fourth was another very difficult 3.6 mi. over a high ridge and a really bad bog to reach the end of the portage. These overland distances totaled approximately ten miles. The total distance across the three ponds was another 2.5 miles. These estimates are found in the various men's journals.

On each of the four legs, each bateau had to be unloaded, then four to six men had to lift the 400-pound bateau and struggle with it over the rough, freshly-cut path, strewn with rocks, slumps, roots and mud. Then each crew had to retrace their steps to carry across the cargo, oars, paddles, poles, their personal equipment and of course their arms.

The total weight of the cargo is unknown. The best estimate is about a half

ton when beginning at Fort Western. Most of this was food. The expedition was planned to feed 1100 soldiers for 45 days or about 110-120 tons, based on each soldier of that era receiving a little over 3 lb. per day.

All these estimates indicate that multiple trips were needed over each portage. How many? The Rev. Spring in his journal observed that each boat's crew had to undertake about six trips to get everything over.

We have elaborated upon the unique nature of the barrier called the Great Carrying Place to ensure the reader will comprehend the profound change it would have wrought upon the army and its soldiers. Now let us resume with the narrative.

As soon as each bateau's crew had completed the many trips out of the valley to the first pond, they launched their bateau and crossed the small pond, a half mile to its SW shore. Many of the men not finding room in the heavily-laden boats had to crash through the thickly-wooded shore to reach the beginning of the next portage. Some crews were leading several cattle purchased from farmers far down the valley. These would be slaughtered for meat later.

Col. Arnold established a temporary headquarters on the shore of the pond overseeing each contingent as they began the next leg of the portage. At this point he and his officers estimated that desertions and sickness had shrunk his small army from its original 1080 that left Cambridge to about 950 effectives (record keeping in the young army was far from precise). This was discouraging but not unusual for militia armies of that era. There were no Continental troops, as there was no nation yet. Worse, the quartermaster revealed they were already short on rations. He reluctantly ordered the reduction of the daily allotment of food to three-quarter rations for each soldier (the exact amount is unknown, but a standard ration for armies of that period was approximately three and one-third pounds, hardly enough for men exerting so vigorous an effort). Unfortunately, any large game that could have supplemented the rations had been driven far away by the noise, gunfire and smell of nearly a thousand soldiers.

Also, the plague of all armies of that era, dysentery, had already struck. Arnold ordered a log cabin to be hastily built to house the sickened men who could no longer keep up. They would have to be left behind, hopefully to return to the settlements if and when they recovered. The cabin was dubbed "Arnold's hospital" (the site of this was discovered in 2015 by the AEHS).

Soon each company in turn passed this site and began the next leg of the portage to the second pond, Middle Carry, which was a relatively level six-tenths of a mile.

This pond was quickly crossed to its west end where a large stream entered, marking the beginning of the next portage trail which lead to the third pond.

This third leg was a distance of two miles over a low ridge which divided the ponds. The trail began by following a so-called “horseback,” (glacial esker) that soon descended into a horrendous bog. Here the men sunk knee- and thigh-deep into black muck while carrying their heavy loads. Some soldiers bitterly complained that their shoes or boots were sucked off, never to be found in the muck.

Arnold camped that night with his troops on the west shore of the third pond, West Carry. It was getting colder and darkness fell sooner. The men had to huddle around roaring fires to keep warm and to dry out.

In the morning they rowed a mile across the pond to its west shore. Ahead was another high ridge which required a climb up the portage trail of 500 feet from the pond. Besides the awful climb the last leg of the portage was three and a half

miles to reach its end. This was at Bog Brook, a tributary of the Dead River.

As they descended the far side of the ridge, they saw ahead, a high twin-peaked mountain. This was later to be named Bigelow Mountain named after Major Timothy Bigelow, one of the two majors on the expedition. Some of the men commented they had never seen a mountain that high (4100 feet).

They soon reached a flat valley, encountering a “savanna.” This was actually a spruce bog, treacherous to walk across, with a thin crust of grass over deep mud. It was more than half a mile across. The soldiers with their heavy loads quickly punctured the crust, sinking into the muck creating no more than a cattle path. Arnold had to order several companies to cut and lay trees across the route creating a “corduroy” path. This further slowed the advance. On the far side Arnold’s party finally reached the end of the Great Carrying Place at Bog Brook. It was only a short distance to reach the placid Dead River.

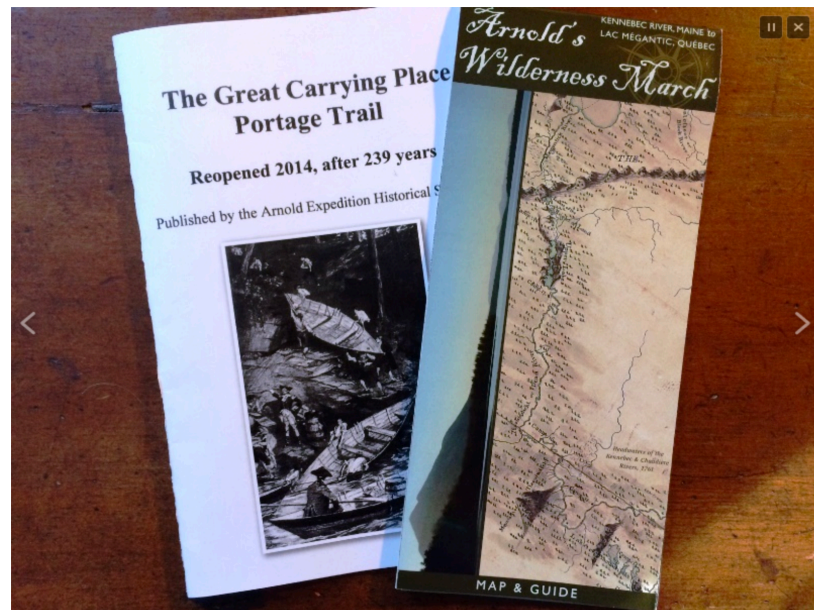
It had taken five to seven terrible days for the soldiers to get themselves and their equipment across this carry. The extreme effort to accomplish this had changed the army. They were diminished in strength, short on food, surrounded by an utter wilderness, had lost much of their equipment, their bateaux were all leaking

and some men, discouraged, were mumbling about turning back. The winter was almost upon them.

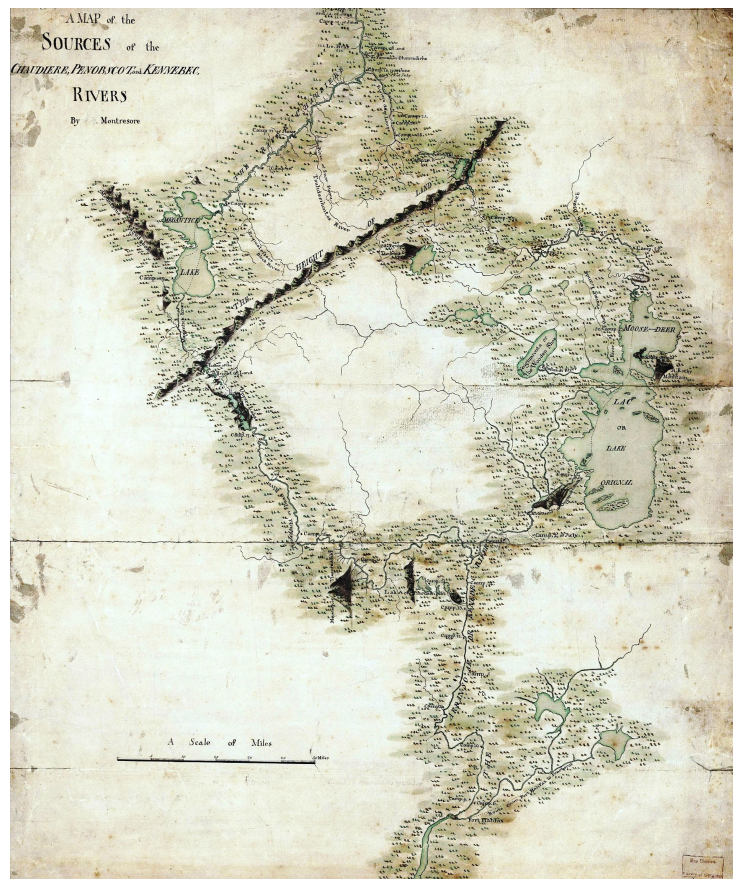
[To Be Continued]

***Maine Today* article on the Trail**

They say timing is everything. The very day our last issue went into the mail, I received a link to an article in *Maine Today* about the Arnold's March trail. It has a lot of detail, many pretty pictures, and a good deal to say about the AEHS and its role. Turns out it ran in 2014. You can see it all on [Maine Today's website](#) if you search for "Arnold".



New guides and maps to the Great Carrying Place Portage Trail and Arnold's March to Quebec. Photo © Carey Kish.



John Montresor's map, 1760.

AEHS Membership Form

Mail this form with your check to: AEHS, c/o Fred Clark, 9 Randall Rd., Winslow ME 04901
Include your phone number and email address if this is acceptable, and please advise whether or not
you want to receive the newsletter electronically. Make check payable to AEHS.

Category:

_____ Individual Membership \$30

_____ Family Membership \$35

_____ Contributing Membership \$75

_____ Life Membership \$220 (one-time payment)

Additional donation for Society programs _____ (tax-deductible)

To order the 16-page booklet-guide to The Great Carrying Place Portage Trail, send check for \$5.00 to
AEHS. Non-members, please add one additional dollar for postage.

To order the AEHS 18 x 28 color, two-sided map of The 1775 Expedition's Route from the Kennebec
River to Lac Megantic, Canada send check for \$5.95. These can be ordered unfolded, for framing or
wall mounting, for an additional \$6.00 to cover cost of shipping tube and postage.

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